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SB 185

FEB 07 2011

TO: FAX: 14064444875

February 7, 2011
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Livingston, Montana 59047

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PAGE ONE OF THREE

(Fourteen copies sent
Please distribute to the following)

TO: All members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:
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PAGE TWO OF THREE

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To the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am an old lady now, and hesitant to travel our snowy passes in this weather, or I would be there before you tomorrow to tell you of lessons learned long ago in my life.

My grandmother was a feisty proponent of justice and civil rights, working around the globe to better conditions for women and children. She taught me that as a society, we are responsible for how we treat each member of our community. She explained that we were in the process of becoming a better people, who no longer stone criminals, nor engage in public hangings, and that eventually, we will recognize that justice is not served by the death penalty.

She filled my head with a number of "good" reasons for her position, and I'm sure that you will hear some of those enumerated during your deliberations: Economically we spend more to execute than to incarcerate for life; The punishment is measured out disproportionately to the poor, marginalized and people of minority ethnicity; There will always be the possibility of executing an innocent, as indeed recent DNA tests have shown to have happened, and more data is becoming available all the time that shows that, rather than acting as a deterrent, the possibility of the death penalty sometimes acts as an incentive for criminals to kill witnesses. Our spiritual teachers generally agree that we must move towards eliminating the death penalty. All of these are good arguments for us to act to replace the death penalty with life imprisonment without possibility of parole.

I have another, more personal reason to oppose the death penalty. Forty-nine years ago my beloved grandmother was murdered in the home we shared. Had we ever known who killed her, the circumstances of her death would have called for ultimate punishment. For forty-nine years I have

PAGE THREE OF THREE

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struggled with and learned from this horrible act, and this I know for certain: There is nothing that can begin to compensate for my loss, were one or a dozen people put to death in retaliation, neither revenge, nor punishment of any sort would adequately balance the scales of justice. We cannot right the heinous wrong of murder by taking another life in the mistaken belief that this would be just payment for the crime. That is placing way too little a value on the life of my wonderful and farsighted grandmother.

I can best honor her memory by pleading with you to consider moving the state of Montana forward into the future by enacting Senate Bill 185 and replacing the death penalty with life imprisonment without possibility of parole.

Respectfully,
Margarita McLarty

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